

Public Health—Seattle & King County—Soil Safety Guidelines

Following these guidelines will help keep your house healthier and cleaner. Dirt has germs, bacteria, chemicals, and other unhealthy things in it. Dirt and dust can be breathed in or eaten, which can be harmful to your health. So encourage your family to follow the soil safety guidelines to reduce the amount of dirt and dust you inhale and ingest!

Inside your home:

- Take off your shoes before entering your home.
- Wash hands and face thoroughly after working or playing in the soil, especially before eating.
- Damp mop and wipe surfaces often to control dust.
- Wash toddler toys and pacifiers often.
- Scrub vegetables and fruits with soap and water.
- Wash clothes dirtied by contaminated soil separately from other clothes.
- Repair painted surfaces in homes. Homes built before 1980 may contain lead-based paint. Older paint flakes may be a source of lead.
- Eat a balanced diet. Iron and calcium help keep lead from becoming a problem in the body.
- Use water and soap to wash – avoid “waterless” soaps.

Outside your home:

- Keep children from playing in contaminated dirt.
- Cover bare patches of dirt with bark, sod or other material, or fence off area.
- Dampen dusty soils before gardening.
- Wear gardening gloves.
- Do not eat or drink in contaminated areas.
- Keep vegetable gardens away from old painted structures and treated wood.
- Do not plant food crops under the roof overhang of your home.
- Keep pets off of exposed dirt so they don’t track it into the house.

More information and resources:

Some soils in King County are contaminated with chemicals such as arsenic and lead. These chemicals have come from many places, including industrial emissions, leaded gasoline, and pesticides. Arsenic and lead can cause illness, especially in children. If you have young children, talk to their pediatrician about a simple blood-lead test. For more information, visit our website at: <http://www.metrokc.gov/health/tsp/arseniclead.htm> or contact Bonnie Meyer at 206-205-1150.